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SUBJECT: LESOTHO: REGAL HOSPITALITY FOR SWAZILAND'S KING

¶1. SUMMARY: King Mswati III of Swaziland, accompanied by Queen Lantentesa, various princes and princesses, cabinet ministers, and traditional chiefs, made an April 9-11 state visit to the Kingdom of Lesotho. While King Mswati has visited Lesotho on several occasions for SADC and other regional meetings, this was his first official bilateral state visit. At official state functions, both Lesotho's King Letsie III and King Mswati III stressed the commonalities of their kingdoms. Mswati went out of his way to mention that Swaziland could learn from Lesotho how to exercise its new responsibilities in multilateral forums. Although an absolute monarch may seem like an anachronism in Lesotho, King Mswati III's visit to Lesotho emphasized the similarities of two small kingdoms looking to forge their own paths in the shadow of their much larger neighbor, South Africa.
END SUMMARY.

The King and the Parliament

¶2. King Mswati III of Swaziland, accompanied by Queen Lantentesa, various princes and princesses, cabinet ministers, and traditional chiefs, made an April 9-11 state visit to the Kingdom of Lesotho. While King Mswati has visited Lesotho on several occasions (the 1996 and 2006 SADC Summits, King Letsie III's Coronation in 1997, Lesotho's royal wedding in 2000, and the 2005 Smart Partnership Dialogue), this was his first official bilateral state visit. On the afternoon of his arrival in Lesotho by private royal aircraft, the King addressed a joint session of Lesotho's parliament. Mswati stated that Lesotho and Swaziland face similar developmental challenges including persistent drought, high rates of unemployment, and diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS. He hailed regional cooperation and South African Development Community (SADC) organizations as key in overcoming these obstacles.

Banquet Fit for a King

¶3. Later in the evening of April 9, Lesotho's King Letsie III officially welcomed King Mswati at a state banquet in his honor, attended by several hundred officials and guests including the diplomatic corps. During his address, King Letsie underscored the close friendship and historical commonalities between the two kingdoms. In response, King Mswati also remarked on the positive relationship and commonalities between the two countries, noting that his visit to Lesotho would give him the chance to seek advice regarding Swaziland's new responsibilities under SADC and the African Union. The Swazi King noted that, "The time has come for us as Africans to demonstrate to the world that we can properly manage our affairs." In conclusion, Mswati noted the importance of the upcoming SADC conference on poverty and development in Mauritius to discuss poverty reduction strategies and the importance of information technology transfer for the region's development.

14. On April 10-11, King Mswati travelled with King Letsie on a cultural tour including visits to the Liphofung Caves, Letseng Diamond Mines, Katse Dam, and the royal village of Matsieng. Despite a workers' strike at Letseng Diamond Mines, all three of these visits proceeded without incident. King Mswati departed Lesotho in the afternoon of April 11.

Royal Hospitality, Star Power

15. COMMENT: Lesotho's royal family gave King Mswati III a grand welcome for his visit to Lesotho. However, the two monarchies, while quite friendly, are very different. King Letsie's genteel separation from Lesotho's tumultuous political environment and his limited constitutional executive authority may have struck King Mswati as a curiosity. And although an absolute monarch may seem like an anachronism in Lesotho, King Mswati III's visit to Lesotho emphasized the similarities of two small kingdoms looking to forge their own paths in the shadow of their much larger neighbor, South Africa. END COMMENT.

NOLAN